GAP

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The names for numbers are perhaps the oldest words in our vocabulary. They are so old that the reasons for their use have been lost. There is an attempt to relate three to beyond through the prefixes tri- and trans-. There is also an attempt to relate five to hand, more apparent in the Polynesian languages than in the Indo-European.

However, the word gap was introduced into the language during historic times. Its history, although well-known, has until now not been documented.

Our remote ancestors had two sets of numbers, the lesser numbers from one through ten, and the greater numbers from twelve through one hundred and ten.

Because the two sets of numbers and their attendant arithmetics were believed to have been given to mankind by the gods, nobody thought to question the system. It was not until society developed the concept of personal property that a desire to find the relations between the two sets of numbers emerged. Medieval communities regarded land, flocks, herds, and food supplies as communal property. Indeed, the only personal property a man had was his children. Any in excess of ten were sacrificed.

The first evidence of dissatisfaction is found in the fifteenth-century anonymous manuscript Liber Numerii, a compilation of arithmetic practices for the two number systems. However, it contained an epilogue: "It should be moot that philosophers develop practices whereby the two number systems can be reconciled."

The Church considered this blasphemous and ordered all copies burned. It was well for the author's health that he was not known. However, a few copies escaped; two have survived to this day.

A number of them must have survived and been read by philosophers. No writings survive, but executions for heresy increased by a factor of ten during the next quarter-century.

In 1497, one Theopolus Quintus solved the problem: "If a new number is inserted into the gap between ten and twelve, the two number systems become as one." He proposed that the new number be two parallel lines.

This discovery cost him his life. But from the Church's standpoint he died in vain. The use of the new number spread like wild-

fire through the business and scientific communities of that era. The ecclesiastic courts became clogged to the point of uselessness.

At length, the church authorities capitulated – in part. The use of the new number was reduced from a mortal to a venial sin. This edict is still in the Codus. So, to this day those of us who use arithmetic are technically sinning.

Quintus's name for the new number was "the gap between ten and twelve". Much too unwieldy, it was quickly shortened to **gap**, the name we use today.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORD AND PHRASE ORIGINS

There are many books on English etymology available, but this oversize (592 pages, 9-by-11½ inches) one stands out by virtue of the fact that it gives short essays of the origins of nearly 7500 words and phrases, more than most others of this genre. For example, I recently looked in vain for a discussion of hanged high as Haman, but successfully located it in this book. The author, Robert Hendrickson, admits that he often includes a doubtful etymology if it makes an interesting story, but he does label these as such. Do you know how to goodnight a bull (tuck his testicles inside his body to prevent chafing in long cattle drives) or grangerize a book (cut out illustrations for one's private anthology)? And how do you save a sailor (stop a bar-glass from ringing) or make a boondoggle (a leather neckpiece worn by Boy Scouts 50 years ago)? Published by Facts on File for $40, this book should make a fine Christmas gift for a logophile (not included) or bookworm (look it up).

The book contains a few items of primarily logological interest: brief discussions of acrostic (telestich and abecedarian rhymes), anagram, and palindrome; the famous twice-translated phrase "the whiskey is all right but the meat has gone bad" for "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"; and Torpenhow Hill, which translates to Hillhillhill Hill.